

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
73544 Hwy 64
Meeker, CO 81641

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: CO-110-2002-111-EA

PROJECT NAME: Smith C. Allotment, #06814
Grazing Section 15 Lease Renewal

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Township 1 North, Range 90 West, Sections 19, 20 and 30

APPLICANT: H.J. Crowell, Grazing Record #0501514

ISSUES AND CONCERNS (optional): Lynx Habitat

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Background/Introduction: The Smith C. Allotment consists of approximately 742 acres of which 344 acres are public land. Approximately 65 acres are located on the south side of Rio Blanco County Road 8 and 279 acres are on the north side of Rio Blanco County Road 8. Previously, ranch owner H.J. Crowell of Sanibel, Florida run leased livestock under an approved livestock control agreements. In 2002, the ranch began to purchase registered Black Angus cattle and to date continue to run some leased cattle to fill the lease. The ranch has not been able to maintain a consistent use pattern because of the leased livestock and lack of ranch management. Recent history of winter feeding of the livestock takes place on the private meadow near the barn and corral located in Pasture 1B (see Figure 1). During the summer months the ranch puts up hay on the private pastures.

Grazing allotments within the White River Field Office (WRFO) have been placed in one of three management categories that define the intensity of management: (1) improve, (2) custodial and (3) maintain. These categories broadly define rangeland management objectives in response to an analysis of an allotment's resource characteristics, potential, opportunities, and needs. This allotment has been categorized as a "C" or Custodial on which no significant problems/issues/resource conflicts have been identified. Management of the allotment is satisfactory.

Annual precipitation varies from approximately 18.5 to 30 inches. Snowfall, which accounts for at least 50% of the annual precipitation, occurs from October to May and accumulates on the

ground from November through April. This landscape has high potential for growth and regrowth of all herbaceous species along with retained moisture capabilities. The proposed action can be divided into two elevation zones with dominate vegetative classifications as listed below:

VEGETATIVE CLASSIFICATIONS			
Allotment # 6814	Pasture Name	Elevation Range	Vegetation Type
Pasture 1	1A	7400 – 8200	Mountain Shrub, Spruce/Fir Aspen Woodlands
Pasture 2	1B	7200 - 7400	Mountain Shrub partial hay field in production
Pasture 3	2	7400 - 8200	Mountain Shrub and Aspen Woodlands
Private Pasture	Private Pasture	7200 - 7400	Mountain Shrub partial hay field in production

Allotment inspections took place on the following dates: June 5, 2002; June 14, 2002; January 31, 2003; June 14, 2003; June 27, 2003; June 10, 2004; and September 1, 2004.

Proposed Action (*Modification of Grazing Schedule*): The proposal is to divide the allotment into three pastures plus a private pasture (see Figure 1): Combined, pastures 1A and 1B are approximately 227 acres of which 65 are public land; Pasture 2 is approximately 384 acres of which 278 are public land; and a Private Pasture with approximately 131 acres of which 1 is public land.

The table below reflects the public lands within each pasture of the allotment:

Pasture Name	Total Acres	Acres of Public Lands
1A	76	65
1B	151	0
2	384	278
Private Pasture	131	1

The proposed action reflects the grazing system that has been in operation for the past two years as a result of a verbal agreement developed in conjunction with the ranch manager, D.J. Cornutt and the BLM. Formal documentation of a rest period from livestock grazing will be incorporated into this renewal. The rest period restricts the permittee from grazing the allotment from November 1 to April 19 of each year. In addition, the active Animal Unit Months (AUMs) have been reduced which more accurately reflects the carrying capacity of the rangelands.

With the creation of the three-pasture grazing system this will allow for a change in grazing use periods by cattle on the allotment and the renewal of H.J. Crowell, Grazing Permit (0501514) for a 10-year period as outlined in the table below, with a Term and Condition on the permit to follow the prescribed grazing schedule as outlined in this Environmental Assessment (EA):

GRAZING SCHEDULE						
Allotment #/Name #06814, Smith C.	Livestock #/Kind	Grazing Begin	Grazing End	% Federal Range	Type Use	AUMs
Pasture 1A & 1B	40 Cattle	6/1	6/30	29	Active	11
Pasture 2	40 Cattle	7/1	8/31	91	Active	74

This alternative requires timely placement of livestock into the appropriate pastures. With the newly constructed lay down fence between the U.S. Forest Service and the BLM in Pasture 2 (northern boundary of the allotment) problems with trespass livestock, grazing off of the Forest onto BLM will be eliminated.

When the permittee is finished grazing on Pasture 2, they are allowed only to return to pasture 1B (which has no federal range) for fall grazing and winter-feeding. The Permittee will put up a fence between pastures 1A and 1B to keep the cattle off of Pasture 1A. Cattle are not allowed to graze Pasture 1A after June 30.

The following terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 4130.3 will be included in the renewal of the grazing lease:

1. Any changes in grazing use must be applied for prior to the grazing period.
2. Each year billing notices are issued they will specify, for the current year, the allotment number and kind of livestock, period of use, animal unit months of use, and the grazing fees due. These billing notices when paid become a part of this grazing lease.
3. Grazing fees are due upon issuance of a billing notice and must be paid in full prior to making any grazing use under this grazing lease, unless otherwise provided for in the terms and conditions of this grazing lease.
4. No grazing use can be authorized under this grazing lease during any period of delinquency in the payment of amounts due in settlement for unauthorized grazing use.
5. Grazing use authorized in this grazing lease may be suspended, in whole or in part, for violation by the permittee/lessee of any of the provisions of the rules or regulations not or thereafter approved by the Secretary of the Interior.
6. This grazing lease is subject to cancellation, in whole or in part, at any time because of:
 - a) Noncompliance by the permittee/lessee with rules and regulations now or hereafter approved by the Secretary of the Interior.
 - b) Loss of control by the permittee/lessee of all or a part of the property upon which it is based.
 - c) A transfer of grazing preference by the permittee/lessee to another party.
 - d) A decrease in the lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management within the allotment described herein.
 - e) Repeated willful unauthorized grazing use.

7. This grazing lease is subject to the provisions of Executive Order #11246 of September 24, 1965, as amended, which sets forth nondiscrimination clauses. A copy of this order may be obtained from the authorized officer.
8. The permittee/lessee must own or control and be responsible for the management of the livestock authorized to graze under this grazing lease.
9. The authorized officer may require counting and/or additional or special marking or tagging of the livestock authorized to graze under this lease.
10. The permittees/lessee's grazing case file is available for public inspection as required by the Freedom of Information Act.
11. In order to improve livestock distribution on the public lands, all salt blocks and/or mineral supplements will not be placed within a ¼ mile of any riparian area, wet meadow, or watering facility (either permanent or temporary) unless stipulated through a written agreement or decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4130.3-2(c).
12. In accordance with 43 CFR 4130.8-1(F): Failure to pay grazing bills within 15 days of the due date specified in the bill shall result in a late fee assessment of \$25.00 or 10 percent of the grazing bill, whichever is greater, but not to exceed \$250.00. Payment made later than 15 days after the due date, shall include the appropriate late fee assessment. Failure to make payment within 30 days may be a violation of 43 CFR 4140.1(b) (1) and shall result in trespass action by the authorized officer under 43 CFR Secs. 4150.1 and 4160.1-2.

No Grazing Alternative: The grazing lease would not be renewed, and livestock grazing use on this allotment would be discontinued.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD: *Continuation of Current Management:* Renewal of grazing lease for the Smith C. Allotment, #06814, for a ten year term as follows:

Allotment #/Name	Livestock #/Kind	Grazing Begin	Grazing End	% Federal Range	Type Use	AUMs
#06814, Smith C.	43 Cattle	04/20	10/31	50	Active	138

The current grazing schedule of April 20 to October 31 is 1) outside of the grazing date for this elevation and snow pack melt period for the April 20 turn on date, and 2) if the allotment were openly grazed with these dates the timing would not allow for plant growth or potential regrowth during the growing season. This system does not meet the current RMP requirement for rest. This schedule does not meet the Grazing Management Guidelines for periodic rest or deferment. Using the schedule would potential exceed the utilization limits and would eventually require a

reduction in livestock stocking rates and/or grazing duration depending on various factors which at a minimum include big game use needs.

NEED FOR THE ACTION: BLM Lease #0501514 which authorizes livestock grazing on the Smith C. Allotment expired on February 28, 2002 and was renewed under the Appropriations Rider to allow time for the analysis process but will expire on February 28, 2005. This lease is subject to renewal at the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior for a period of up to ten years. The BLM has the authority to renew the livestock grazing lease consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and the White River Resource Area's Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). This RMP/EIS has been amended by the Standards for Public Land Health in the state of Colorado. The Public Land Health Standards will be addressed in this Environmental Assessment (EA).

The following EA will analyze the impacts of livestock grazing on public land managed by the BLM. The analysis will recommend terms and conditions to the lease which improve or maintain public land health. The public will benefit from lands which are maintained in a healthy condition and provide sustainable resources for a variety of uses. The terms and conditions will also meet the public's need to: "Stop injury to the public grazing land by preventing overgrazing and soil deterioration; to provide for their orderly use, improvement, and development, to stabilize the livestock industry dependent upon the public range; and for other purposes." as stated under the Taylor Grazing Act.

In order to graze livestock on public land, the livestock producer (permittee/lessee) must hold a grazing permit or lease. These permits/leases are for seasonal use only, not year-long grazing. When permitted livestock are on public land, the permittee can save forage on other lands needed for the livestock grazing during the remainder of the year. The livestock producer depends on this permitted use to ensure the economic viability of his/her ranching operation.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: Record of Decision; Livestock Grazing, pages 2-22 through 2-26.

Decision Language: The Proposed Action implements the White River RMP Livestock Grazing Management objective on page 2-22 to 2-26:

- to maintain or enhance a healthy rangeland vegetation composition and species diversity, capable of supplying forage at a sustained yield to meet the demand for livestock grazing and
- to provide for adequate forage plant growth and/or regrowth opportunity necessary to: 1) replenish the plants food reserves; and 2) produce sufficient seed to meet the reproduction needs necessary to maintain an ecological presence in the plant community. This objective will be accomplished by implementing a grazing system.

Also as stated on page 2-10, the goal of the livestock management program is to improve the rangeland forage resource by managing toward a desired plant community. In the future, allotment categorization, levels of management, and lease modifications could be made if additional information suggests that this is warranted during scheduled and unscheduled BLM allotment inspections.

The proposed action has been reviewed for conformance with this plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3). The action conforms to the decisions/pages of the plan listed above.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES:

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH: In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. The following table summarizes the assessment of each public land health standard for each allotment. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH							
Standard	Current Situation			With Proposed Action		With No Grazing	
	Achieving or Moving Towards Achieving	Not Achieving	Causative Factors	Achieving or Moving Towards Achieving	Not Achieving	Achieving or Moving Towards Achieving	Not Achieving
#1 - Upland Soils							
1	344 acres	0	NA	344 acres	0	344 acres	0
#2 - Riparian Systems							
2	3 acres	0	NA	3 acres	0	3 acres	0
#3 - Plant Communities							
3	294 acres	50	Noxious Weeds	294 acres	50	294 acres	50

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH							
	Current Situation			With Proposed Action		With No Grazing	
Standard	Achieving or Moving Towards Achieving	Not Achieving	Causative Factors	Achieving or Moving Towards Achieving	Not Achieving	Achieving or Moving Towards Achieving	Not Achieving
#3 - Animal Communities							
3	344 acres	0	NA	344 acres	0	344 acres	0
#4 - Special Status, T&E Species							
4	344 acres	0	NA	344 acres	0	344 acres	0
#5 - Water Quality							
5	344 acres	0	NA	344 acres	0	344 acres	0

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: The 1998 BLM/Colorado SHPO Protocol agreement requires the BLM to identify all historic properties and sacred sites on all lands within Colorado that are within the APE of a BLM undertaking (1998 Protocol VII (A) p. 4), which is defined as the geographic area(s) within which an undertaking may cause changes in the character or use of historic properties (36 CFR 800.2). During Section 106 review, a cultural resource assessment was completed for this allotment on September 5, 2002 following the procedures outlined in IM-WO-99-039, IM-CO-99-007 and IM-CO-99-019. Copies of the cultural resource assessment are available in the White River Field Office archaeology files and the summary report is attached to the range allotment lease file.

No cultural resource inventories have been conducted within the allotment and no National Register or otherwise eligible cultural properties are known to be situated in this allotment. There are no known historic properties considered to be potentially 'at risk' from damage due to grazing allotment operations. Based on available data, a low potential exists for historic properties in Allotment #06814. Subsequent cultural resource inventories may be conducted in areas where livestock concentrations coincide with high potential for discovering vulnerable historic properties.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Direct impacts that may occur where livestock concentrate include trampling, chiseling and churning of site soils, cultural features and artifacts, artifact breakage and impacts from standing, leaning and rubbing against above ground features and rock art. Indirect impacts may include soil erosion, gullyng and increased potential for unlawful collection and vandalism. In areas where cultural site presence coincides with areas of livestock concentration, continued grazing may contribute to substantial

ground disturbance and cause cumulative, long term, irreversible adverse effects to historic properties. Alteration of grazing patterns by rotating pastures should have the effect of decreasing any potential damage to existing cultural resources by decreasing the time frame for impacts on any given site. No increased impacts are anticipated and no impacts to any known historic properties are anticipated.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: Under this alternative, the grazing lease would not be renewed. This alternative would result in no continuing impacts to historic properties.

Mitigation: Appropriate mitigation measures may be identified in consultation with Colorado SHPO within the ten-year period of this lease. It is recommended that a renewal be issued for this lease subject to the allotment specific stipulations contained in the information forms.

If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered by the permittee, the permittee shall immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the BLM.

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: Approximately 50 scattered acres of the invasive, non-native species, yellow toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris* Mill.), has been identified as occurring on the allotment. This invasive species is widespread on the adjacent U.S. Forest Service property. Yellow toadflax is one of the most difficult to control of the noxious weed species. Other species of concern include Canada, bull and musk thistles, and houndstongue.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: No weed control program has been identified in the grazing program. If the BLM and grazing permittee initiate a control program of this weed, an island free of yellow toadflax would be created. To maintain this area free of yellow toadflax extreme vigilance by the permittee will be required. Without control yellow toadflax will eventually increase and dominate the plant communities decreasing available forage. Over time BLM would be required to decrease the carrying capacity of this allotment. At such time as a control effort was implemented for yellow toadflax and other noxious weed species would also be controlled.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

Mitigation: The BLM and grazing permittee will initiate a weed control program for yellow toadflax. A Pesticide Use Proposal and Environmental Assessment will have to be prepared prior to spraying and all spraying would have to be under the control of a certified applicator.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: A number of migratory birds fulfill nesting functions in these aspen and spruce-fir associations from late May through mid-July. Birds of higher conservation interest (i.e., Colorado Partners in Flight program) that are commonly found in this area include: red-naped sapsucker, broad-tailed hummingbird, and violet-green swallow (aspen) and olive-sided and Hammond's flycatcher (spruce-fir). A pair of greater sandhill cranes has nested in the center of the pond in Pasture 2 for the past three years. Local data suggests that sandhill crane colts fledge by mid-July.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Livestock related impacts to passerine birds are generally associated with reductions in herbaceous vegetation as nest cover or a source of forage (e.g., seeds or substrate for invertebrate prey). Proposed livestock use in Pasture 1A is largely coincident with the core nesting season, but demonstrated low levels of cattle use culminating in light cumulative utilization by elk and cattle should have no effective influence on the frequency or outcome of nesting attempts. Regrowth after 30 June in this pasture would largely replenish the volume of herbaceous vegetation as a forage source for birds rearing flighted young.

Livestock turn-out in Pasture 2 would occur near the end of the migratory bird nesting cycle (July 1) and incremental reductions in ground cover would become evident sometime after the completion of most primary nesting attempts. Reductions in herbaceous volume would be most evident on the ± 80 acres in the vicinity of the pond. Moderate grazing use of mature aspen habitats should pose no substantive threat to those birds, including sapsuckers, which prey on arboreal insects. Progressive reductions in foliage volume may cause localized declines in the availability of small aerial insects that are targeted by birds such as flycatchers and swallows, particularly those associated with the wetland. Hummingbirds may also experience moderate reductions in their forage base via declining availability of flowers and reductions in small insects they glean from low foliage. Concentrated use or trampling of wetland habitats may reduce aquatic insects and amphibians as prey for cranes.

The ramifications of incremental declines in invertebrate abundance and flowering plants after the fledging of young would be difficult to assess, particularly if these effects prompt dispersal to surrounding habitats. In any event, moderate and localized declines in the availability of seeds, flowers, or invertebrate prey on 80 acres would likely result in subtle suppression in annual recruitment rather than declines in nest density or abundance of adults. These effects would not compromise population viability or contribute to significant declines in any bird species or group at any landscape scale. Where grazing use is expected to be most influential, stubble height limitations (4" residual) should successfully moderate the influence of vegetation removal in upland situations and prevent excessive use and deterioration of the wetland from concentrated cattle use. (See also discussion in Terrestrial Wildlife section below)

Disturbance of nesting by sandhill cranes occurs when all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) drive in close proximity to the pond and nest. In the past, the permittee has made numerous trips via ATVs in close proximity for either fence maintenance reasons, or to check on the crane nest itself. Such trips can cause nest abandonment/failure by sandhill cranes.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: There would be no action authorized that would have potential to reduce herbaceous ground cover and associated forage bases for migratory birds. Disturbance from ATV use by the permittee to nesting cranes would be substantially reduced under the no action alternative.

Mitigation: Fence maintenance trips by the permittee should be done as late as possible prior to turning out cattle. Additionally, concerted efforts should be made to conduct this maintenance either on foot or horseback, or with a minimal amount of trips via motorized vehicles to reduce the disturbance to nesting cranes. Trips for fence maintenance or to move cattle should be directly to the site without loitering near Fawn Creek Pond to reduce the duration of disturbance to cranes.

Annual turnout of cattle shall not occur prior to July 1 to allow completion of most migratory bird nesting activities and full development of wetland vegetation. If concentrated or excessive livestock use of the pond violates the land health standards for aquatic wildlife or riparian vegetation, the BLM may require in the future that part or all of Fawn Creek Pond be fenced to maintain/restore the integrity of the wetland habitats.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES

Affected Environment: The following animals that are listed or candidate to the Endangered Species Act were evaluated in the context of livestock grazing effects attributable to this grazing lease renewal: Canada lynx, bald eagle, Colorado pike-minnow and downstream Colorado River fishes, Mexican spotted owl, and boreal toad. Detailed impact analysis for all species was presented to the USFWS in the form of a Biological Assessment; this discussion is a summary of the section 7 consultation performed through that document. The Biological Assessment is included and available within the Smith C. grazing lease file. BLM sensitive animals that are involved with this action were limited to the greater sandhill crane and northern leopard frog, which are variously addressed in the migratory bird, aquatic wildlife, and terrestrial wildlife sections below.

Canada lynx: This allotment is encompassed by habitat considered suitable for Canada lynx, a federally threatened species undergoing active recovery efforts in Colorado.

BLM lands within Pasture 1A encompass 65 acres of habitat considered appropriate for general winter forage use by lynx (represented by mixed conifer interspersed with small patches of mature aspen). This parcel encompasses about 0.1 percent (65/66538 acres) of winter habitats available in the North Fork of the White River Lynx Analysis Unit (LAU). Pasture 1A possesses characteristics consistent with preferred lynx habitat. Accumulations of large woody debris are common and well distributed on the floor of this mature to over mature mixed conifer slope. Although coniferous canopies of 40% or more are not continuous across the tract, canopy breaks tend to be a product of patchy decadence with a commensurate response by shrub and conifer regeneration. These components provide desirable thermal/hiding cover and forage for snowshoe hare (the primary prey of lynx). Although steep slopes probably work to limit hare density across the tract, several sets of snowshoe hare tracks were found on private lands in late

January 2004 at the interface of conifer forest and the valley floor in close association with riverine willow communities. Red squirrel (important alternate prey) middens were frequent and well distributed in this parcel. This pasture's herbaceous community displays a high degree of similarity to the site's potential natural community, that is, possessing a complement of native forbs and grasses considered appropriate to physical site conditions in terms of composition, proportion, and abundance.

BLM lands within Pasture 2 encompass about 173 acres of habitat classified as unsuitable for lynx (i.e., larger tracts of mature aspen with little conifer expression) and 103 acres of habitat categorized as 'other' (i.e., steep, south-facing mountain shrub slopes). These habitat categories constitute 0.27% and 3.8% of like habitats mapped within the Aldrich Lakes LAU, respectively.

The mature aspen woodlands comprising the bulk of Pasture 2 possess few attributes amenable to the support of snowshoe hare as the primary prey of lynx. Because the woodland floor is generally herbaceous in character with little downed woody material, with limited aspen regeneration or conifer interspersions, and only scattered stands of low growing snowberry that are typically unavailable beneath snowpack, this parcel offers virtually no winter thermal/hiding cover or woody forage base for hare. Consistent with these observations, BLM biologists found no evidence of snowshoe hare (i.e., tracks) in the course of extensive ground inspection in January 2004. In the same vein, woodland and shrubland habitats available on this allotment do not provide the structural complexity (e.g., conifer dispersion) or features (e.g., coarse woody debris) considered necessary for lynx denning or overall security habitat.

The availability of alternate winter prey also appears limited on this portion of the allotment. Lack of conifers and downed woody material and the mature and relatively dry character of the aspen stand significantly reduces prospects for the support of strong red squirrel or cottontail populations or the consistent availability of blue grouse. Blue grouse tracks were encountered during January inspections, but were likely attributable to a single wintering male. Although oakbrush and serviceberry shrublands on this parcel's lower slopes are ostensibly suitable for white-tailed jackrabbit, these steep (50-65%) south-facing slopes are neither suited to the support of high jackrabbit densities nor are they favored habitat for lynx. Although these slopes were not inspected for hare, BLM found no evidence of jackrabbits in the valley bottom, and no animals were encountered during summer, fall, and winter field visits.

Mexican spotted owl: Northwest Colorado is not within the core distribution of Mexican spotted owl. Presumed suitable habitat in this area may consist of arid canyonlands or mature to old-growth mixed conifer stands associated with steep canyons containing exposed bedrock cliffs or multiple tiers of exposed rock on canyon walls. There are no habitats resembling these in or near the project area. The Blanco Ranger District of the White River National Forest, within which this BLM parcel is integral, has no habitat considered suitable for Mexican spotted owl.

Bald Eagle: Bald eagles make use of the upper forks of the White River for nesting and summer foraging, but BLM is not aware of any nest sites within several miles of this allotment. BLM understands that during the summer, eagles on the upper White River rely heavily on fish obtained from privately-owned ponds stocked with trout. Irrigated haylands and riverine habitats

encompassed by privately owned portions of the allotment are not known to serve as an important source of bald eagle prey.

Although bald eagles are known to use upland conifer sites as winter roosts, the ponds and upper portions of the river do not provide adequate foraging opportunity for eagles through the winter and selection of nearby forest stands for roosting functions would be improbable. There is no evidence or history to suggest that the area's aspen and conifer stands or mountain shrub slopes are used by eagles for anything other than infrequent and opportunistic foraging activity.

Boreal Toad: Based on published accounts, the boreal toad inhabits shallow waters or moist riparian or emergent vegetation among wet meadows and the margins of streams and ponds in subalpine areas between 7500 and 12000 feet. In summer, adult toads make extensive use of upland montane forests, particularly when associated with wet meadows or spring/seep sites. Boreal toads may breed in any body of water with sunny exposures and quiet, shallow waters. Egg-laying has been documented only rarely in streams. Based on these criteria, the forested pond in the northern BLM parcel in this allotment is broadly suitable as general adult summer habitat, though no evidence exists that this site has been used by toads. The last boreal toad documented in the White River drainage was a single male at Trapper's Lake in 1994. Since that time, the Blanco Ranger District has conducted annual surveys in prime historical habitat with no positive results. The Forest Service is unaware of any historical records of toad in the Fawn Creek pond.

Colorado River Fishes: The North Fork of the White River is tributary to the White River, which bears critical habitat for the Colorado pike-minnow beginning at Rio Blanco Lake, approximately 45 valley miles downstream of this project. There are no water developments attending renewal of this grazing lease and therefore there would be no depletion of flows contributing to endangered fish habitat in the White or Green Rivers, which also involves populations of bonytail, humpback chub, and razorback sucker. Current and expected rangeland conditions associated with livestock grazing on this allotment meet rangeland health standards for soils and surface water quality, thus there is no reasonable concern for measurable sediment contributions into the White River system that could influence the quality of downstream fisheries.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Canada lynx: Proposed livestock grazing use in Pasture 1A (i.e., up to 40 cattle for no more than 30 days in June) is considered fully compatible with the long-term maintenance of native plant community structure and composition and would maintain those physical and biological characteristics believed to be important as winter foraging habitat for lynx. The vegetation communities comprising this Public Land parcel are generally in a later successional state, and there are no apparent indications that livestock grazing would affect the normal rate or direction of successional processes. Although diminutive in scale, maintenance of shrubland and woodland communities on this BLM parcel would continue to provide cover appropriate for winter prey acquisition and travel corridor.

Past grazing practices in Pasture 2 are believed to have been erratic, relatively unregulated, and have resulted in grazing use that was not compatible with desirable rates of improvement in

herbaceous composition and ground cover in the vicinity of the pasture's wetland. Prescribed grazing management (i.e., up to 40 cattle for no more than 60 days in July and August) and fence maintenance is expected to rectify trespass use and reduce the intensity and duration of grazing use consistent with improving trends in native plant vigor, composition, and residual ground cover and better satisfy the Colorado Standards and Guides for Rangeland Health. Although we not believe that Pasture 2 is an essential component of potential lynx habitat in the Aldrich Lakes LAU, proposed livestock use is not expected to have any detrimental influence on the maintenance of shrub and aspen components and understory conditions, or the rate and direction of successional processes that may support lynx habitat features in the future.

With respect to the maintenance of habitat features that function as important cover and forage constituents for lynx, BLM believes that grazing activities on BLM lands within the Smith C. allotment have the potential to affect potential lynx habitat, but based on our analysis, we believe renewing this lease as proposed would be consistent with continued maintenance and development of lynx habitat and would be unlikely to adversely affect the short or long term utility or suitability of lynx habitat.

Mexican spotted owl, bald eagle, Colorado River fishes, and boreal toad: By merit of species distribution, project character, or paucity of suitable habitat, Mexican spotted owl, boreal toad, Colorado River fishes, and bald eagle would not be affected by renewing the grazing lease for the Smith C. allotment.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: Failure to reauthorize grazing use on this lease would remove any potential for cattle-induced grazing effects on habitats associated with Canada lynx. The other species considered in the Biological Assessment would continue to remain unaffected.

Mitigation: Although none are anticipated, any conservation measures developed as the result of consultation with the FWS will be applied to this lease.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: The public land health standard for threatened and endangered species is currently being met and will continue to be met under the proposed action.

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID

Affected Environment: Hazardous or solid wastes are not expected to be a part of the affected environment. However, these materials may accidentally be introduced in the environment through the implementation of the proposed action. Fuel, oil, grease, and antifreeze are all associated with vehicles associated with implementing the proposed action and would only be introduced into the environment because of equipment failure. Minute loss of these materials through normal operation of equipment, maintenance and fueling procedures are not considered spills. Spills are generally defined as the loss of large quantities of these materials into the environment and are determined to be a spill on a case-by-case basis.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: For any given accident or incident involving hazardous materials, consequences will be dependent on the volume and nature of the incident and material released. Short term impacts such as contaminations of soils, vegetation, and surface water could occur.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: No hazardous wastes would be introduced into the environment under the no action alternative.

Mitigation: None.

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND

Affected Environment: The allotment is in segment 4 of the Colorado State Water Quality Standards Table, which includes all tributaries to the North Fork of the White River, including all wetlands, lakes and reservoirs from the Flat Tops Wilderness Area boundary to the confluence with the South Fork of the White River except for the specific listings in Segment 1. A review of the Colorado's 1989 Nonpoint Source Assessment Report (plus updates), the 305(b) report, the 303(d) list and the Unified Watershed Assessment was done to see if any water quality concerns have been identified. All actions are within the White River watershed.

The State has listed designated beneficial uses as being: Cold Aquatic Life 1, Recreation 1a, March 1 through November 30, Recreation 1b, December 1 through February 28, Water Supply and Agriculture. The state has further defined water quality parameters with table values. These standards reflect the ambient water quality and define maximum allowable concentrations for the various water quality parameters. The anti-degradation rule applies to this segment meaning no further water quality degradation is allowable that would interfere with or become harmful to the designated uses.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Water quality data is not available for the drainages within the allotment although, it is not anticipated that the changes being made to the grazing regime will have a measurable affect on water quality.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: With no grazing occurring on the BLM portions of the allotment, a slight improvement to water quality could occur within the Fawn Creek stream channel because of reduced fecal matter contamination and greater filtering by vegetation that receives no livestock grazing pressure. However, this benefit would not be significant to the overall drainages because grazing by livestock would continue on other segments of Fawn Creek as well as the other tributaries to the North Fork White River and the BLM segment of the creek is a minority portion.

Mitigation: Refer to mitigation in the Riparian section.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality: The minor level of contamination from livestock use has not affected the drainage from meeting the state water

quality standards; there is no reason not to expect water quality to continue to meet the state standards with the proposed action.

WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES

Affected Environment: A three-acre pond and wetland complex exists in Section 20 of Township 1 North, Range 90 West, 6th P.M. (Pasture 2). The status of this wetland has been evaluated each of the last three seasons and has consistently been found to be in Proper Functioning Condition (PFC). This shallow wetland is in a later successional stage with vegetation comprised of sedges, bulrushes, and cattails. An additional, smaller (about 1 acre) pond is located about 100 feet southwest of Fawn Creek Pond. Both ponds are used by cattle. Although uncertain whether this system is typically ephemeral, the ponds have dried up by August of each of the last three years.

The North Fork of the White River runs through the center of this allotment on private land; no BLM lands are associated with the river.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: In the face of northwest Colorado's continuing and severe drought, current grazing practices in Pasture 2 have remained compatible with maintenance of proper functioning condition in the wetland complex. The present grazing regime apparently allows for full development of emergent vegetation, including a coincident period of cattle grazing in July, prior to the disappearance of surface water in August.

Until recently, the fence forming the northern boundary of this pasture was in disrepair and cattle from the adjoining Forest Service lease used water from these ponds over an extended period. The current permittee rebuilt this fence in 2004. Precluding trespass cattle use and proposed revisions to the grazing lease (e.g., 50-60% reduction in potential duration of use, defined period of spring rest) are intended to reduce the intensity and duration of grazing use as a means of initiating improvements in herbaceous composition and increasing residual ground cover in the vicinity of the pond. Although the functional status of the wetland complex may remain static, attendant reductions in trampling damage and the use of emergent vegetation (i.e., increased residual cover into the fall months) would likely prompt increases in vegetative cover within the wetland, increased persistence in soil moisture, and increased duration of surface water availability into the later summer and fall months.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: No cattle would be allowed to graze within this allotment. Wetland vegetation in Pasture 2 would not be subject to cattle-induced reductions in mid to late summer. The functional status of the wetland complex would remain in Proper Functioning Condition with a decidedly smaller risk of seasonal grazing-induced deterioration (i.e., elk). Increased vegetative cover and reduced trampling damage would prolong moisture availability in wetland soils and the duration of surface water availability.

Mitigation: Close monitoring by BLM personnel will occur on Fawn Creek Pond in Pasture 2. It will be monitored at least biannually to assure that the pond maintains a PFC status. A minimum stubble height of four inches shall be maintained in Pasture 2 on BLM lands, particularly around Fawn Creek Pond. If height is reduced below four inches, the BLM may direct the cattle to be removed prior to the pasture off-date of August 31.

Additionally, should monitoring indicate that this regime is detrimental to the wetland community in the future (for instance, due to drought resulting in reduced wetland plant vigor), the BLM may require part or all of Fawn Creek Pond to be fenced in a manner to preclude use by cattle for the purposes of maintaining the integrity of the wetland vegetation/condition.

Fencing on all portions of these pastures will be maintained in a functional state to effectively control livestock-related influences on wetland and rangeland resources.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems: Under the proposed action, grazing use intensity and duration is expected to decline relative to current use. Because current use is at least minimally adequate to retain the functional status of the wetland complex in Pasture 2, there is a strong likelihood that reducing the intensity and duration of livestock use under the proposed action would enhance wetland conditions, including moisture retention and the vigor, extent, and diversity of wetland vegetation. These effects would be consistent with improving the functional condition of the wetland and, with increased assurance, help satisfy components of the health standard pertaining to vegetation vigor and diversity and wildlife habitat development.

There would be no livestock grazing under the no-action alternative and because there are no apparent indications that this area would be subjected to concentrated elk use, it is likely that the wetland would develop to its full functional capacity in retaining moisture and providing habitat for wetland-associated wildlife.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED

No flood plains, prime and unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness areas, threatened, endangered or sensitive plant species exist within the area affected by the proposed action. For threatened, endangered and sensitive plant species Public Land Health Standard is not applicable since neither the proposed nor the no-action alternative would have any influence on populations of, or habitats potentially occupied by, special status plants. There are also no Air Quality, Native American religious or environmental justice concerns associated with the proposed action.

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following elements **must** be addressed due to the involvement of Standards for Public Land Health:

SOILS

Affected Environment: Baseline soils data have been collected for Rio Blanco County by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and are published in order III Soil Survey. These surveys are available for review from the White River Field Office. The table below identifies soil characteristics for the soils encountered from the proposed action

Soil Number	Soil Name	Slope	Range site	Salinity	Run Off	Erosion Potential	Bedrock
26	Cowdrey-Tampico loams	15-50%	Spruce and Fir Woodland/Brushy Loam	<2	Medium	Very high	>60
28	Delson-Perma complex	3-65%	Stoney Loam	<2	Medium to Rapid	Slight	>60
45	Jerry-Thornburgh-Rhone complex	8-65%	Brushy Loam	<2	Medium to Rapid	Moderate to High	>60
50	Lamphier-Tampico-Kamack loams	5-60%	Aspen Woodlands/Brushy Loam	<2	Medium	High	>60
78	Rock Outcrop	50-100%	None		Very High	Slight	0
88	Tampico-Miracle complex	8-50%	Brushy Loam/Mountain Loam	<2	Medium	Moderate to Very High	>60

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action will utilize forage on soils on steep and gentle slopes, and in drainage bottoms. It is anticipated that the level proposed of cattle use will result in proper utilization levels and not decrease soil protection. Under the proposed action's season of use and AUM totals, overall impacts to the soils should be negligible in respect to changes in erosion rates, pedestaling, and undesired alterations in vegetation types and cover. There would be ample opportunity for regrowth of native vegetation after livestock grazing, thus maintaining the current state of the plant communities that provides adequate soil protection.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: Ground cover and density of the existing plant communities would increase when receiving no grazing pressure from livestock. Soil stability would increase with the additional vegetative matter. However, current conditions of the soil are in a satisfactory state and meeting the standards for rangeland health. Therefore, the perceived impact of increased soil stability may be minor within the functionality of the rangelands.

Also, an elimination of livestock grazing on BLM may lead to an increase use of the neighboring private lands. Thus, this situation may cause greater use levels that would degrade upstream private land health conditions due to a possible loss of ground cover. This situation may then transcend upon the downstream soil conditions on BLM, due to the loss of ground cover upstream which would cause greater stream flow events.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils: This standard is currently being met and is expected to be met under the proposed action.

VEGETATION

Affected Environment: The BLM parcel in Pasture 1A is primarily composed of Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir and blue spruce on the north facing slope which is generally steep to >25%. The understory and plant communities associated with this type of canopy cover exist in more than adequate numbers and are in good condition with active growth, vigor, and seed production present.

The BLM parcel in Pasture 2 is primarily composed of aspen woodlands on the ridge top and Gambel oak/mountain shrub species on the south facing slope which is steep to >25% with pockets of Engelmann and blue spruce, and subalpine fir on the northern most . The understory and plant communities associated with this type of canopy cover exist, in general, are a developed grass-forb understory, along with good residual and litter throughout the federal acreage, and are in good condition with the exception of the invasion of yellow toadflax which can be attributed to the vast infestation located on the neighboring U.S. Forest Service lands.

Environmental Consequences of Proposed Action: All of the range sites within the allotment, Pastures 1A and 2, represent plant communities within acceptable thresholds for healthy communities and within acceptable levels of a desired plant community as defined in the White River ROD/RMP. Vegetation production and species composition on these sites provided adequate cover for soil protection and forage production to meet demands. These communities meet or exceed the Colorado Public Land Health Standards. The grazing use proposed for this allotment/two pasture system is expected to maintain a healthy rangeland condition but is not likely to change the current seral rating of these range sites.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: The no grazing alternative is expected to maintain the current rangeland condition and seral range site ratings.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for vegetation: This standard is currently being met and is expected to be met under the proposed action.

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC

Affected Environment: Under prevailing drought conditions, the wetland complex in Pasture 2 has been ephemeral over the past several years, with surface waters disappearing by August. However, this wetland continues to sustain a population of northern leopard frog (a BLM sensitive species) and undoubtedly serves to produce aquatic insects that provide an important prey source to the many insectivorous birds that nest in surrounding aspen habitats. In

addition, the wetland's potential to produce amphibian and invertebrate prey is likely central to consistent nesting on the larger pond by greater sandhill crane. It is not known if current drought conditions have influenced the wetland's amphibian abundance or reproductive success. Current levels of ungulate grazing and trampling in the wetland during the later summer months limits the density and height of vegetative ground cover and accelerates the loss of soil moisture in the wetland's basin (i.e., lack of shading and increase in surface area). Although current livestock grazing use has not eliminated amphibians from the wetland, there is a strong likelihood that reduced soil moisture regimes and physical trampling/shearing of bottom substrate (where amphibian and invertebrate forms escape desiccation during dry periods) limits the abundance and resilience of amphibian and invertebrate populations.

The North Fork of the White River runs through the center of this allotment and is wholly encompassed by private lands. All riverine reaches within this allotment are fenced out of pastures that contain BLM-administered lands. This stream supports a highly regarded trout fishery that sustains an important recreational fishing industry and landowners, whether for personal or commercial interests, have a vested interest in maintaining riparian and channel conditions that are conducive to the maintenance of high quality aquatic habitat.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Because the wetland provides the only water for the upper elevations of this pasture, cattle-related grazing and trampling effects in July and August would persist, although at a level and duration reduced by up to half of that described in the Affected Environment section above. Established spring rest and stubble-height requirements, reduced trespass grazing, and reduced late summer grazing use intensity provided for in the proposed action should moderate the rate and absolute reduction of wetland vegetative cover (invertebrate substrate and soil shading) via consumption and trampling. Improved soil moisture regimes and reduced cattle shearing of wetland substrate should result in incremental improvements in quality of habitat for resident amphibian and invertebrate populations. Provisions for early removal of cattle and exclusionary fencing provide adequate tools to maintain a positive trend in the condition of this wetland habitat.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: There would be no livestock grazing under the no-action alternative and because there are no apparent indications that this area would be subjected to concentrated elk use, it is likely that the wetland would develop to its full functional capacity in retaining moisture and providing habitat for wetland-associated wildlife.

Mitigation: See mitigation in Riparian section.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial): Under current grazing regimens, aquatic wildlife communities associated with this wetland have been sustained, but habitat capacity is likely reduced from the site's potential. Although there is no evidence suggesting that the standard is being persistently violated, the proposed action would alleviate extraneous livestock use attributable to trespass and, at a minimum, reduce the duration of permitted livestock use. It is believed that these measures would aid in reestablishing soil moisture regimes more consistent with the maintenance of an appropriately diverse and resilient community of aquatic vertebrates

and invertebrates, thereby helping to more consistently satisfy components of the health standard.

There would be no livestock grazing under the no-action alternative and because there are no apparent indications that this area would be subjected to concentrated elk use, it is likely that the wetland would fully meet the intent of the standards in providing habitat for wetland-associated wildlife.

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL

Affected Environment: The allotment's aspen benches and south-facing mountain shrub slopes north of the river are used by elk throughout the year, but are particularly important during the winter, whereas the spruce-fir forests south of the river are used more exclusively during the summer through early winter months. Deer use is almost wholly restricted to the late spring through early winter months.

Mature aspen woodlands often represents preferred nesting habitat for woodland raptors such as Cooper's and red-tailed hawk, but no raptor nesting activity was evident through the course of several allotment inspections made by a BLM biologist during the summer, fall, and winter seasons.

Although of limited acreage, the varied habitat types encompassed by this allotment (i.e., spruce-fir, aspen, and mountain shrub) support a large array of nongame birds and mammals. The species associated with this allotment are widely distributed in like habitats and none are known to be highly specialized or narrow endemics. Owing to well developed ground cover and subcanopy components, it is likely that non-game populations associated with Pasture 1A are likely at or near potential in terms of abundance and species richness. Although Pasture 2 bears a history of more intensive grazing use, the herbaceous understory beneath the mature aspen and deciduous shrubland communities are capable of supporting a full complement of associated nongame species, albeit at reduced densities where grazing use tends to be most prevalent (80 acres of aspen within 0.25 mile of the pond).

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: There is no indication that livestock use has any substantive bearing on the availability of herbaceous forage for big game at any landscape scale, particularly in Pasture 1A. Moderate levels of later summer cattle use and removal of cattle no later than late August, particularly on the south facing slopes of Pasture 2, would precondition bunchgrass growth for fall use by big game (i.e., reducing dormant top-growth and enhancing access to nutritious fall regrowth). Established spring rest and reduced grazing use of Pasture 2 is expected, over time, to improve the density and frequency of native grasses and forbs in the understory, especially in the vicinity of the wetland, thereby improving the quality and abundance of forages important for big game during lactation and in preparation for the winter season.

Livestock grazing in Pasture 1A would have no measurable influence on herbaceous ground cover or woody understory expression as sources of forage and cover for nongame wildlife (see discussion in Migratory Bird section). The proposed action would establish a period of spring

rest in Pasture 2 and allow unimpeded ground cover development through June. This timeframe would allow for the completion of most reproductive activities of small mammals and birds prior to the introduction of livestock and progressive reductions in ground cover. Proposed grazing use conditions in Pasture 2 are intended to improve ground cover density and the frequency of native grasses and forbs, ultimately improving the effectiveness of the understory as a forage and cover source for nongame wildlife. Removal of cattle from Pasture 2 by late August would normally allow a modest degree of fall regrowth and the development of herbaceous residual as a winter forage base for small mammals active through the winter (i.e., voles) and nest cover for ground nesting birds the subsequent spring.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: There would be no livestock grazing under the no-action alternative. Because there are no apparent indications that this area would be subjected to concentrated elk use, it is likely that this pasture's aspen woodlands and mountain shrub slopes would fully meet the standards for providing well developed understory habitat for nongame wildlife. Similarly, trends in supplanting grazing-tolerant understory components (e.g., Kentucky bluegrass) with native species (on the 80 acres near the wetland) may accelerate under a no-grazing alternative, but the difference in the rate of change should be small relative to compliant implementation of the proposed action's stubble-height requirements and late-season grazing regimen.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): The public land health standard is currently being met and will continue to be met under the proposed and no-action alternatives.

OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS: For the following elements, only those brought forward for analysis will be addressed further.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Access and Transportation		X	
Cadastral Survey	X		
Fire Management		X	
Forest Management			X
Geology and Minerals	X		
Hydrology/Water Rights	X		
Law Enforcement	X		
Noise		X	
Paleontology		X	
Rangeland Management			X
Realty Authorizations		X	
Recreation		X	

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Socio-Economics		X	
Visual Resources		X	
Wild Horses	X		

FOREST MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: This allotment contains aspen on north and east facing aspects. These aspen stands are generally in good condition.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The grazing program is expected to benefit seedling/sapling survival of aspen by decreasing the period of livestock use.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative: Seedling and sapling survival would remain unchanged from current conditions. These stands would have adequate regeneration to maintain the stands.

Mitigation: None

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The table below reflects the total number of acres and the amount of public acres within each pasture of the allotment:

Pasture Name	Total Acres	Acres of Public Lands
1A	76	65
1B	151	0
2	384	278
Private Pasture	131	1

The vegetation and woodland types on public land described by ecological sites are as follows:

Pasture 1A:

Ecological Site	Vegetation Type(s) - Grass
Brushy Loam	Nodding brome, mountain brome, slender wheatgrass, western wheatgrass, Letterman and Columbia needlegrass, elk sedge
Woodlands	Engelmann Spruce, Subalpine fir

Pasture 2:

Ecological Site	Vegetation Type(s) - Grass
Brushy Loam	Nodding brome, mountain brome, slender wheatgrass, western wheatgrass, Letterman and Columbia needlegrass, elk sedge

Ecological Site	Vegetation Type(s) - Grass
Mountain Loam	Nodding brome, needlegrasses, fescue, slender wheatgrass
Stoney Loam	Indian ricegrass, needle grasses, muttongrass, western wheatgrass, junegrass, elk sedge, serviceberry, snowberry
Woodlands	Aspen, Gamble Oak

The proposal for the Smith C. Allotment will be made up of three pastures (Pastures 1A, 1B, and 2) and one private pasture. The following table is a summarization of the Livestock Grazing Capacity, which are broken down by individual soil units and acres/AUMs. This table shows an estimated carrying capacity of livestock for the land ownership associated with the proposed action. The calculations are based on a moderate stocking level which are generally less than the stocking rates recommended by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for the specific ecological sites. The reason for these moderate stocking levels is that they meet the Colorado public land health standards in relation to the rangeland's carrying capacity and current rangeland conditions.

SOIL UNIT	ECOLOGICAL SITE	BLM Acres	Fair Acres / AUM	Fair Total AUMs
Cowdrey-Tampico loams,15-50%clopes	Lodgepole Pine Woodland/Brushy Loam	42.58	3.45	12.34
Curecanti very cobbly loam,1-8%slopes	Loamy Slopes	0.01	5.56	0.00
Delson-Perma complex,3-65%slopes	Stoney Loam	9.46	4.17	2.27
Jerry-Thornburgh-Rhone complex,8-65%slopes	Brushy Loam/Brushy Loam	31.81	3.45	9.22
Lamphier-Tampico-Kamack loams,5-60%slopes	Aspen woodlands/Brushy Loam	151.29	3.45	43.85
Redrob Variant loam	Mountain Meadow	0.67	0.60	1.12
Rock Outcrop	None	13.25	0.00	0.00
Sinkson gravelly sandy loam,1-8%slopes	Loamy Slopes	0.62	5.56	0.11
Sinkson gravelly sandy loam,8-15%slopes	Loamy Slopes	5.23	5.56	0.94
Tampico-Miracle complex,8-50%slopes	Brushy Loam/Mountain Loam	89.14	3.45	25.84
Water	None	0.21	0.00	0.00
Totals:		344.27		95.70
Acres per AUM				3.60

SOIL UNIT	ECOLOGICAL SITE	Pvt ACRES	Fair Acres / AUM	Fair Total AUMs
Cowdrey-Tampico loams,15-50%clopes	Lodgepole Pine Woodland/Brushy Loam	24.99	3.45	7.24
Curecanti very cobbly loam,1-8%slopes	Loamy Slopes	23.75	5.56	4.27
Delson-Perma complex,3-65%slopes	Stoney Loam	13.57	4.17	3.25
Lamphier-Tampico-Kamack loams,5-60%slopes	Aspen woodlands/Brushy Loam	44.49	3.45	12.90
Redrob Variant loam	Mountain Meadow	50.92	1.67	30.49
Rock Outcrop	None	5.65	0.00	0.00
Silas loam,0-8%slopes	Mountain Swale	48.45	14.29	3.39
Silas loam,8-12%slopes	Mountain Swale	3.70	14.29	0.26

SOIL UNIT	ECOLOGICAL SITE	Pvt ACRES	Fair Acres / AUM	Fair Total AUMs
Sinkson gravelly sandy loam,1-8%slopes	Loamy Slopes	57.54	5.56	10.35
Sinkson gravelly sandy loam,8-15%slopes	Loamy Slopes	33.43	5.56	6.01
Tampico-Miracle complex,8-50%slopes	Brushy Loam/Mountain Loam	54.12	3.45	15.69
Water	None	17.35	0.00	0.00
Totals:		377.96		93.86
Acres per AUM				4.03

The federal range portion in Pasture 1A of the allotment is situated on a north facing, steep slope with the majority of the ecological site being a woodland forest mixture of Engelmann Spruce and Subalpine Fir along with a few isolated pockets of aspen. The understory mixture is currently in a productive state and composed of a mid- to late seral rating for all vegetation classes. Due to the low use by the livestock, the permittees weed control in the private hay meadows, and the topography of the federal range in this pasture it will likely exceed the standards. In general, for Pasture 1A the amount of cattle use is reduced proportionate to the amount of lands suitable for cattle distribution, plant communities, and use levels by cattle in recent grazing years. A portion of the federal land contains steep slopes, which are not suited for cattle use. Cattle have a tendency to congregate along level places, thus lessening their utilization of steep slopes. Therefore cattle use will be in the drainage bottoms and the gentler slopes.

The federal range portion in Pasture 2 of the allotment is situated on a ridge top, running in portions to the southern most corner of the pasture to a southern exposure off of a steep slope. The ecological site component is a woodland forest mixture of aspen and Gambel oak/mountain shrub, and spruce. The understory mixture is currently in a productive state composed of a mid- to late seral rating for all vegetation classes. With the regulated livestock use in this pasture but with noxious weed issues this pasture will only meet the standards. Water for this pasture comes from two spring sources. Based on recent allotment inspections they are adequate sources until late in July when they seem to dry up. One source is the Fawn Creek Pond located NW1/4 NE1/4 of Section 20 of Township 1 North, Range 90 West, 6th P.M. and the other source located SE1/4 SE1/4 of Section 19 of Township 1 North, Range 90 West 6th P.M. It was determined that during allotment inspections this pasture received cattle grazing use across the entire landscape.

The federal range portion in the private pasture is approximately 1 acre. This private pasture has historically been used for hay production. The public land is located just past the western edge of the hay meadow out of reach of irrigation water therefore no hay production takes place on the public lands. The public land faces south on a gentle slope with some isolated cottonwood trees growing in relation to the White River. The northern boundary of public land is Rio Blanco County Road #8. In recent years, this pasture has not been used for grazing after hay production.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action Alternative: The proposed action, through the new fence and creation of pastures will change the grazing management on the allotment from the present authorized continuous seasonal use to a rotation management plan wherein the timing and duration of summer grazing use is substantially different from the

previous authorization of unmanaged grazing scheme. There is high potential for positive change in both the cover (areas with Kentucky bluegrass) and composition (increase in needlegrass, brome grass and wheatgrass) of the BLM rangelands. Over the longer term, early seral range sites will advance to mid and late seral states. These plant communities will be more resilient and more resistant to invasion by noxious species.

As seen in the carrying capacity table above, the proposed stocking rate will provide the necessary rest and regrowth opportunities to maintain plant community and upland soil health to within the Land Health Standards. In the case of this allotment, the private lands general occupy valley bottoms and the more gentle slopes therefore the change in public land versus private land forage production was adjusted (i.e., from 50% federal range to 29% and 91% federal range). Any future changes in season of use or kind of livestock on this allotment would require additional evaluation of the private and public land grazing capacities.

Environmental Consequences of the No Grazing Alternative (No Grazing): Under this alternative, livestock grazing use would not be permitted on public lands. Plant communities would experience an increase in percent ground cover. Grazing would likely continue on the private lands within the boundaries of the allotment, which would require fencing off of BLM lands. The additional amount of fencing would be cumbersome in respects to costs and resource impacts such as wildlife movement.

The applicant would experience a negative economic impact as they are dependent upon public land grazing in their livestock operation. When permitted livestock are on public lands, the permittee/lessee can conserve forage on other lands to meet future livestock requirements. Livestock producers are dependent on this permitted grazing use on public lands to ensure the economic viability of his/her ranching operation

Mitigation: The BLM will continue to make allotment inspections, as deemed necessary, to monitor cattle use to determine any potential adverse impacts to other resource values. If any concerns arise from cattle use, BLM and the permittee will implement appropriate mitigation measures to ensure future rangeland health standards and guidelines are continued to be met.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY

Cumulative impacts associated with livestock grazing were analyzed in the Resource Management Plan for the White River. Also, the wildlife sections in this environmental assessment address cumulative impacts of grazing by livestock and wildlife.

PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED:

The White River Field Office sent scoping letters to the following groups and agencies: Craig District Board of Grazing Advisors and the Northwest Resource Advisory Council. A Public Notice of the NEPA action is posted on the White River Field Office Internet website at the Colorado BLM Home Page asking for public input on lease renewals and the assessment of

public land health standards within the White River Field Office area. Local notification is published in the Rio Blanco Herald Times newspaper located here in Meeker, Colorado on a monthly basis. Individual letters are sent to the lessees/permittees informing them that their lease is up for renewal and request any information they want included in or taken into consideration during the renewal process.

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility
Dale Beckerman	Natural Resource Specialist	Air Quality
Rusty Roberts	Rangeland Management Specialist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Rusty Roberts	Rangeland Management Specialist	Threatened and Endangered Plant Species
Glade Hadden	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources Paleontological Resources
Bob Fowler	Forester	Invasive, Non-Native Species
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal Species, Wildlife
Marty O'Mara	Petroleum Engineer	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Caroline P. Hollowed	Hydrologist	Water Quality, Surface and Ground Hydrology and Water Rights
Ed Hollowed, Melissa Kindall, Glenn Klingler	Wildlife Biologist and Range Technician	Wetlands and Riparian Zones
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness
Caroline P. Hollowed	Hydrologist	Soils
Melissa Kindall	Range Technician	Vegetation
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife Terrestrial and Aquatic
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Access and Transportation
Ken Holsinger	Natural Resource Specialist	Fire Management
Bob Fowler	Forester	Forest Management
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals
Melissa Kindall	Range Technician	Rangeland Management
Joe Raffaele	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Visual Resources
Melissa Kindall	Range Technician	Wild Horses

Finding of No Significant Impact/Decision Record (FONSI/DR)

CO-110-2002-111-EA

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE: The environmental assessment and analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures (listed below) result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

DECISION/RATIONALE: It is my decision to renew Grazing Lease #0501514 as described by the proposed action, with the mitigation measures listed below. This action is in compliance with decisions in the White River ROD/RMP and environmental impacts are expected to be minimal.

MITIGATION MEASURES: 1. Appropriate mitigation measures may be identified in consultation with Colorado SHPO within the ten-year period of this lease. It is recommended that a renewal be issued for this lease subject to the allotment specific stipulations contained in the information forms.

2. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered by the permittee, the permittee shall immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the BLM

3. The BLM and grazing permittee will initiate a weed control program for yellow toadflax. A Pesticide Use Proposal and Environmental Assessment will have to be prepared prior to spraying and all spraying would have to be under the control of a certified applicator.

4. Any conservation measures that are developed under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service informal Section 7 Consultation will be incorporated into the grazing lease.

5. Fencing on all parts of this allotment will be maintained in a functional status to preclude damage/disturbance to wildlife and rangeland resources.

6. Fence maintenance trips by the permittee should be done as late as possible prior to turning out cattle. Additionally, concerted efforts should be made to conduct this maintenance either on foot or horseback, or with a minimal amount of trips via motorized vehicles to reduce the disturbance to nesting cranes. Trips for fence maintenance or to move cattle should be directly to the site without loitering near Fawn Creek Pond to reduce the duration of disturbance to cranes.

7. Annual turnout of cattle onto Pasture 2 shall not occur prior to July 1 to minimize disruption to greater sandhill crane nest efforts and to allow adequate development of emergent aquatic growth as nesting cover.

8. Any deficiencies in the fence keeping cattle from the uplands of the southern parcel will be repaired so as to exclude cattle from these uplands.

9. Close monitoring by BLM personnel will occur on Fawn Creek Pond in Pasture 2. It will be monitored at least biannually to assure that the pond maintains a Proper Functioning Condition status. A minimum stubble height of four inches shall be maintained in Pasture 2 on BLM lands, particularly around Fawn Creek Pond. If height is reduced below four inches, the BLM may direct the cattle to be removed prior to the ending date of August 31.

10. Additionally, should this grazing regimen become detrimental to the wetland vegetation in the future (due to drought resulting in reduced riparian plant vigor, for instance), the BLM may require part or all of Fawn Creek Pond to be fenced in a manner to preclude use by cattle, for the purposes of maintaining the integrity of the wetland vegetation/condition.

11. The BLM will continue to make allotment inspections, as deemed necessary, to monitor cattle use to determine any potential adverse impacts to other resource values. If any concerns arise from cattle use, BLM and the permittee will implement appropriate mitigation measures to ensure future rangeland health standards and guidelines are continued to be met.

12. The permittee shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by the proposed action.

COMPLIANCE/MONITORING: The BLM will continue to make allotment inspections, as deemed necessary, to monitor cattle use and determine any potential adverse impacts to other resource values. BLM and the permittee will implement appropriate mitigation measures to ensure future rangeland health standards and guidelines continue to be met.

NAME OF PREPARER: Melissa J. Kindall, Range Technician

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Caroline P. Hollowed,

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

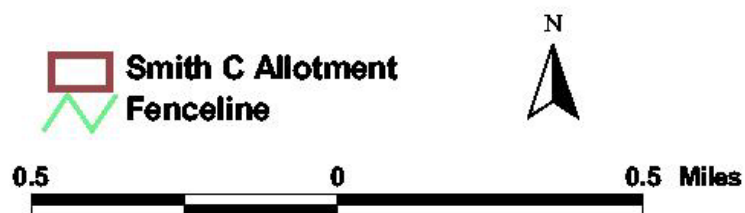
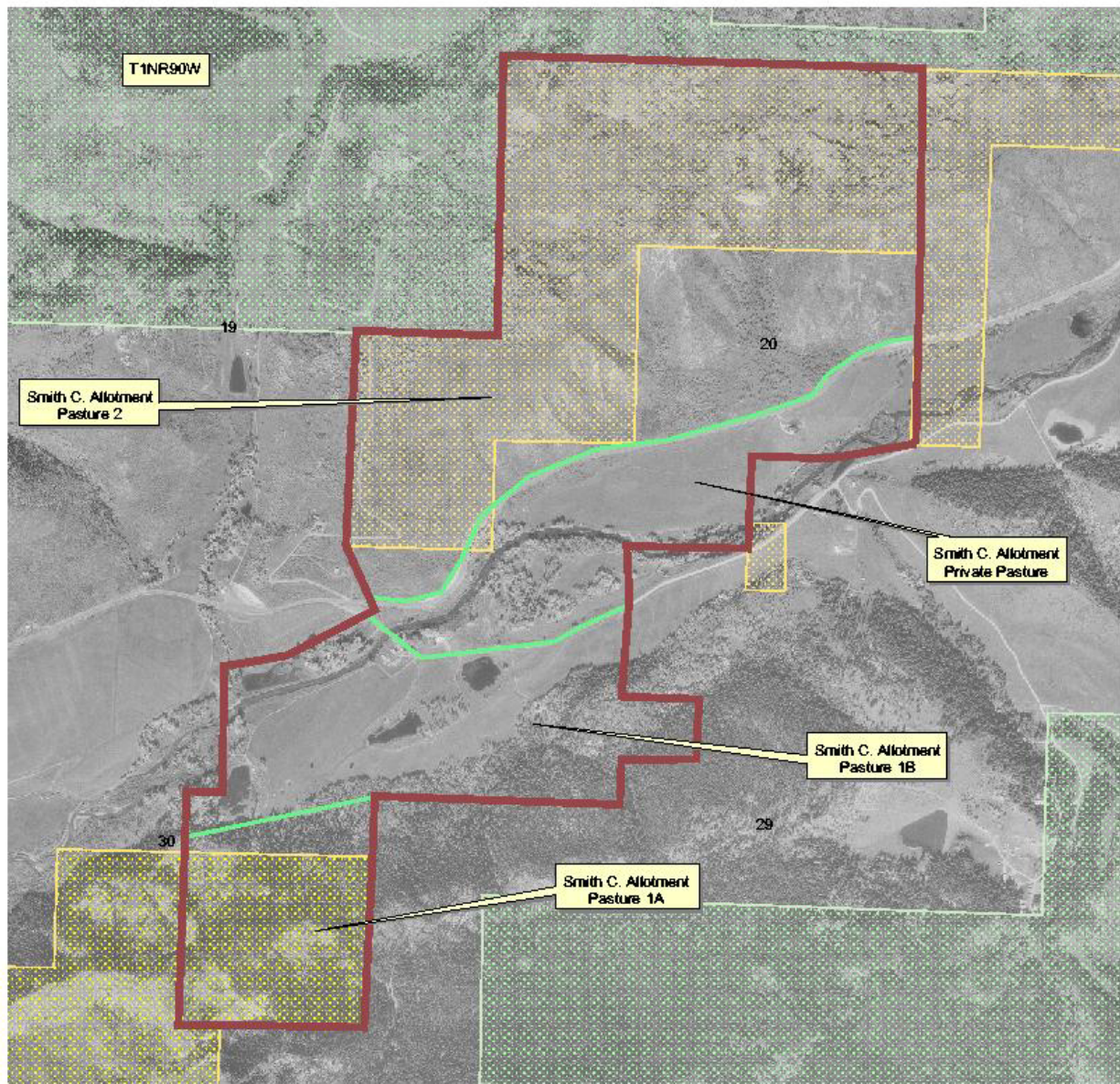

Kent E. Walter, Field Office Manager

DATE SIGNED: 02/28/05

Attachments:

Figure 1 Map of Allotments with pastures
Location map of the proposed action

**Figure 1: Smith C. Allotment with Pastures
#06814**



Location of Proposed Action CO-110-2002-111-EA

